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The museum foyer as a transformative space of communication

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Abstract: *This article explores how we may study physical museum foyers as multilayered spaces of communication. Based on a critical examination of ways in which the museum foyer is conceptualised in the research literature, we define the foyer as a transformative space of communication for visitors which has four transformative functions, and we ask the following question: How do people entering the museum practise these transformative functions so as to become visitors – and become non-visitors again on leaving? Answers are provided through an empirical analysis of the foyer as a transformative communicative space. Based on qualitative studies of four divergent Danish museums and a science centre, we demonstrate that the foyer's communicative space supports transformative functions consisting of multiple phases before and after the visit itself, namely arrival–orientation–service–preparation (before the visit) and preparation–service–evaluation–departure (after the visit). We discuss the implications of these results for the museum and heritage sectors and argue for more granular understandings of the visitor perspective.*

Keywords: Lobby, foyer, visitor studies, museum communication, transformation.

The number of museums worldwide doubled between 1992 and 2012 (Rocco 2013); the frequent redevelopments of iconic museums during the same period speak to a situation in which museums are defined in many parts of the world as levers of innovation in the cultural sector at large. While much museum research during the same two decades has focused on virtual museums and digitisation, a good many museum practitioners have grappled with innovations of a more concrete nature. This article addresses one aspect of the physical museum – the foyer – by asking how we may study this space as a space of communication and do so from both an institutional and a visitor's perspective. The communicative focus is important because it allows an analytical approach which studies the foyer as a relational space of symbolic exchange between the institution and its visitors and not merely as a fixed physical entity. With this communicative focus, the institutional perspective offers an

entry point to analysing and understanding how the museum presents itself and communicates with visitors and the outside world. The visitors' perspective allows an analytical focus on how the foyer's presentation and communication is taken up, practised and made sense of by people entering and leaving the museum. Our analysis demonstrates the validity of what may be termed a processual and dialogic analytical perspective which jointly pays attention to institutional and visitor perspectives of communication and transformative processes.

The article first provides a critical examination of ways in which the museum foyer has been conceptualised across the research literature in order to situate our study conceptually. We then synthesise our concept of the foyer as a space of communication which has four transformative functions, and we ask the following question: How do people entering the museum practise these functions to become visitors – and become non-visitors again on leaving? Answers are provided through a first empirical analysis of the foyer as a communicative space in support of such transformations. Based on qualitative studies of four divergent Danish museums and a science centre, we demonstrate that the transformative functions consist of multiple entry and exit phases, namely arrival–orientation–service–preparation (on entry) and preparation–service–evaluation–departure (on exit). Finally, we discuss the implications of these results for the museum and heritage sectors and argue for more granular understandings of visitor practices.

Unity in diversity: Research on museum foyers

There is no dearth of terms describing entrance spaces to museums – lobby, foyer, entrance hall, vestibule, reception – and such terms indicate that museum foyers share similarities to passage spaces in other large buildings as diverse as hotels, churches, temples, shopping malls and apartment buildings. However, it is much harder to come by systematic conceptualisations of the museum foyer in the research. Most prevalent are definitions of the museum foyer as a physical or as a symbolic space. In terms of physical spaces, obvious resources for understanding museum foyers are found in architecture studies (Naredi-Rainer 2004, Psarra 2009), space and exhibition design (Dernie 2006, Lorenc *et al.* 2007), space syntax (Hillier & Tzortzi 2006/2011) and wayfinding (Arthur & Passini 1992). In the studies on physical museum spaces, the foyer is typically mentioned in passing, since the focus is on how overall spatial layout may optimise functions of use, or how exhibition space may be organised to advance visitor orientation. In their useful overview of spatial syntax, that is, the study of spatial configurations, the architecture theorists Bill Hillier and Kali Tzortzi identify the typical foyer as a "gathering space" that serves as "a space for setting out from and returning to" (Hillier & Tzortzi 2006/2011:298). This resembles some of the first descriptions of museum foyers characterise them as physical connections (e.g. Frary 1916) which link the entrance to the various exhibition galleries. Connection may be embodied by staff who "'wrap around' the site, collections and exhibitions to humanise the museum and bring the visit alive" (Black 2005:99). In her study of wayfinding, another architecture theorist, Sophia Psarra, notes that "the most integrated elements in all museums are the atrium/main hall and the axes that link this space with the main entrance and galleries" (Psarra 2005:82). Yet, David Fleming, director of National Museums Liverpool, reflects the

analytical marginality of this space when he states that "there is no right way to design an entrance hall [...] there is a multitude of ways" (Fleming 2005:59). Such approaches are in line with the well-known museum studies researcher Suzanne MacLeod's definition of museum architecture as "a social and cultural product, continually reproduced through use" (MacLeod 2005:10).

Other traditions focus on the museum foyer as a symbolic space of representation or as an ideological organisation of power display. For example, the art historians Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach analyse how museums share "fundamental characteristics with traditional ceremonial monuments", thereby highlighting a separation of the unique and exceptional ("ceremonial") from the ordinary (Duncan & Wallach 1980:449, see also Duncan 1991, 1995, Macdonald 1998). Similarly, the art historian Jill Delaney speaks of museums' ritual space as creating "a sense of otherness with its surroundings" (Delaney 1992:140). When museums are compared to or modelled on temples, separation is alluded to as a marking off of the sacred from the profane:

> As the visitor leaves the busy street, he or she needs to relax and adopt a calm, receptive mood before entering the displays. It is instructive to look at how temples are designed in many parts of the world: they very often have an entrance court, garden, or hall, where the worshipper can get into the right mood before entering the temple itself. (Ambrose & Paine 2012:44)

On a grander canvas, the focus on museum foyers as ritualised spaces draws on anthropological theories of liminality and cultural transformations (Gennep 1908/1961, Turner 1967) as seen, for example, in studies of liminality in leisure spaces (Kristiansen 2015). Thus, the sociologist Rob Shields defines these spaces as "controlled *limen*", by which he means thresholds *(limen*) "adjunct to everyday life" rather than wholly separate from the realm of community life (Shields 1992:8; see also Zukin 1991, Duncan 1995:7–20).

The traditions of studying museum foyers as physical or as symbolic spaces both approach these spaces from an institutional or a professional perspective. Conversely, visitor studies offers a key reference point for conceptualising visitors' orientation and behaviour in museums, even if the foyer is rarely a centre of analytical attention. An exception is the museum visitor researchers' Stephen Bitgood's and Carey Tisdal's study of how museum foyers may fulfil visitor needs (Bitgood & Tisdal 1996) and Bitgood's specification of these needs in terms of what he calls "conceptual orientation" (where to go, what to do, on-site staff) and "wayfinding" (maps, guides, direction signs) (Bitgood 2002:468). As he notes, "unfortunately, very little research has focused on this area [entrance and foyer], although museums tend to spend considerable energy dealing with these problems" (Bitgood 2002:468). In physical terms, foyers support visitor needs by, for example, cloakrooms, assembly areas, rest areas, restrooms, catering facilities, retail facilities and security offices (Ambrose & Paine 2006:43–45). Museum scholars tend to downplay this type of support; or they write it off as an indication of an experience-economy rationale where "the percentage of space within the building allowed for the display of objects is reduced in favour of spaces to display people" (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:202). Still, when visitors assess their museum visits, such mundane introductory support rank amongst the most important (Black 2005:108). The learning studies scholars John Falk and Lynn Dierking, however, note the

necessity of understanding museum visitors' engagements as going beyond the exhibition: they define the physical context as one of three key contexts for visitor experiences (Falk & Dierking 1992:5). Hence, museum shops can be catalysts of further engagement through visitors' purchase of memorabilia that signify "past presence" at the museum to friends and relatives at home and "give objects a context that is so well structured and so remarkable that we cannot help but remember them" (Psarra 2005:93, cf. also Doering 1999:83). In line with this inclusive approach, the visitor studies researchers Zahava Doering and Andrew Pekarik stress that visitors come with their own "entrance narrative", by which they mean the "internal story line that visitors enter with" (Doering & Pekarik 1996:20). This approach cogently illuminates that research must be attuned to the diversity of visitors and their preconceptions. Naturally, regular visitors know the spatial layout of "their" museum and use the foyer differently from newcomers or from visitors harbouring what the museum consultant Elaine Gurian tellingly terms "threshold fear" (Gurian 2005).

Of particular relevance to our study are a few approaches which combine institutional and audience perspectives on museum space and hence facilitate a more dialogic or communicative focus. A recent study, with which we share data (see next section), seeks to map out all the communicative functions of the foyer, resulting in the categories information functions, social functions, commercial functions and practical functions (Mortensen *et al.* 2014). In a similar vein, other approaches define space as "environments that communicate" (Lorenc *et al.* 2007:8) or "sites of communication and interaction" (Shields 1992:5) where "people continually 'misread' or scramble or resist the museum's cues to some extent; or they actively invent, consciously or unconsciously, their own programs" (Duncan 1995:13). Parry and Kristiansen note that the foyer "remains historically resonant, sociologically complex, interpretatively meaningful, and pivotal to the visit event" (Parry & Kristiansen 2014). These approaches provide a felicitous framework for analysing and understanding foyer spaces which we take up because they focus on processes by which visitors adopt, obey, elide or modify the museum's physical and symbolic frames of experience. In more concrete terms, the research literature refers fleetingly to the museum foyer as a passageway, which points to its key conceptual feature of transformation.

In sum, the research literature provides general pointers for understanding museum foyers as physical and symbolic spaces of transformation. Visitor studies add important perspectives of user experience, while a few scholars propose an inclusive understanding of museum spaces as environments of communication, an understudied understanding which inspires the present study. In the following, we present what, to our knowledge, is a first empirical analysis combining an understanding of the foyer as an environment of communication with a systematic mapping of the ways in which its transformative functions are taken up and practised by visitors in processes of entering and exiting the museum.

Methodology: Data collection and interpretation

The research design and the data collection were part of a joint research project, carried out at a national research centre DREAM (Danish Research Center on Advanced Media Materials).[1] The overall aim was to map out communicative spaces of museum foyers.

Data collection was carried out in November–December 2011 and May–June 2012 at five museums, all partners in the DREAM project. The museums vary in different ways, enabling us to study a diversity of foyers: Two are art museums (Arken, National Gallery of Denmark), two cultural history museums (Moesgaard Museum, Media Museum) and one is a science centre (Experimentarium). The museums also represent different capacities, legal and organisational compositions and visitor numbers, from the National Gallery's approximately 356,000 annual visitors (2013) to the Media Museum's approximately 27,000 annual visitors (2013). All are located in or close to one of three major cities in Denmark. The museums are also very different in architectural terms (see fig. 1–5).

At each foyer, two researchers conducted non-intrusive on-site observation twice on two weekdays. Repetition of observation was carried out to strengthen reliability (Adler & Adler 1994). All ten researchers used an observation guide focusing on both the institutional and the visitor dimensions as a structuring grid for their field notes. These mainly describe practices and flows of interaction (visitor–visitor, visitor–staff), in addition to the communicative and structural properties of architecture, design and layout of

Fig. 1. Arken is a contemporary art museum located south of Copenhagen. Visitors approaching the museum are almost embraced by the building and channelled into the foyer. This is a large, white room with a high ceiling, skylight and no apparent separation from the rest of the museum. When entering the foyer, visitors may choose to go to the ticket counter and information desk or the museum shop. To the left the foyer opens up into the exhibition space. A staircase leads downstairs to the cloak room and toilets. Photo: DREAM 2012.

the interior and service functions. In addition, all researchers wrote memos of reflection, created visual documentation and collected floor plans, guides and maps of the museums. Ad hoc interviews with staff (front desk assistants, shop assistants, security guards) followed an interview guide and focused on job functions and responsibilities, everyday routines and perceived interactions with visitors. The study did not take an interventionist approach, nor did the joint research group opt for in-depth visitor portrayals or visitor routes across the museum, since the focus was not on visitor experiences in general.

After the data collection process and a data session in the joint research group, we divided into two smaller groups with different research aims. One group decided to focus on the functional aspects of the communication space (published in Mortensen et al. 2014), while the authors of the study presented here wanted to focus of the transformative aspects.

Data analysis for the present study was conducted as a series of iterations where analysis of observation data from each of the five museums helped refine our assumptions, which again let us specify visitor practices. Our analysis centred on museum foyers as multilayered spaces of communication practised by visitors, paying attention to both the institutional and the visitor dimensions, especially following the ebbs and flows of people coming to and leaving the museums through the foyer. No specialist software was used during the coding process. First, each pair of researchers organised field data from their museum according to our analytical foci and presented preliminary findings to the rest of the research group. This initial analysis generated a variety of categories which matched practices during the entry and exit phases. Next, a focused coding was carried out to review categories, eliminate less useful ones, break larger categories into smaller ones and so on. This iterative process resulted in a final process of interpretation which revealed four phases of entry (arrival, orientation, service and preparation), and four phases of exit (preparation, service, evaluation and departure). For reasons of analytical clarity, we present these phases below as consecutive routes, although importantly, visitors may not take up all phases or may combine them in different ways than those documented here.

Practising the museum foyer on entry

Arrival

The arrival in a museum literally sets the stage for transforming new guests into museum visitors. The art museum foyers at Arken and the National Gallery are both big, white, formal halls with very high ceilings. The architecture communicates a fairly solemn atmosphere, inviting visitors to display respectfulness. Observations show that on entry visitors often stop and gaze around. Conversely, the foyer of the Moesgaard cultural history museum is modest, inviting a more intimate visitor approach. The Media Museum foyer resembles a modern and approachable café or shop, calling on the urban visitor not only to learn, but also to relax and spend time. Finally, the large Experimentarium foyer, with its pitched volume of voices and many activities going on, appeals to active engagement and participation.

Key to visitors' arrival are their formation of a social group – pupils being counted before entering the exhibitions and adults hanging around waiting for each other before proceeding. Even visitors in smaller groups and visitors who simultaneously arrive on

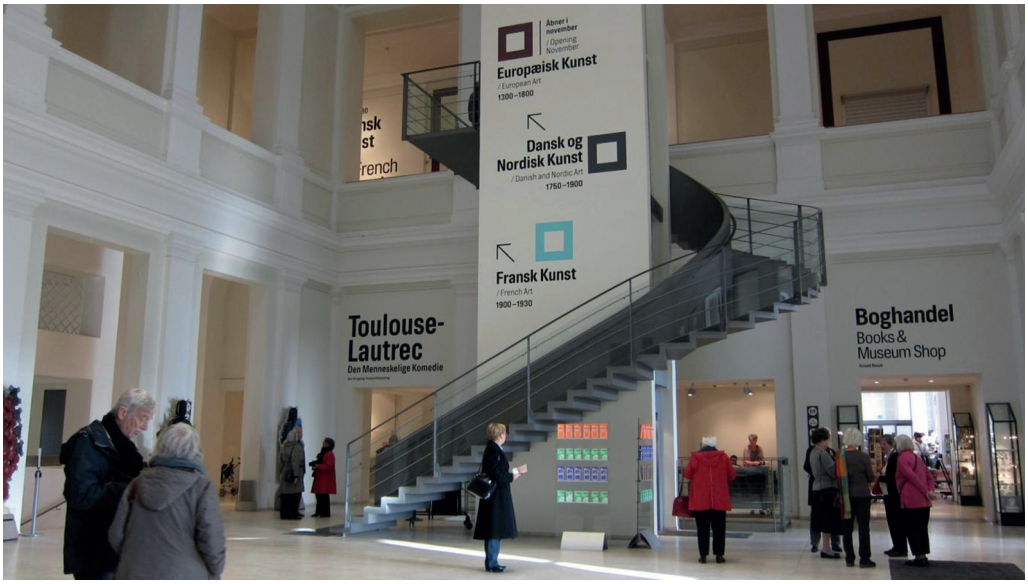

Fig. 2. The National Gallery in Copenhagen is a large temple-like building from 1896. Visitors enter the museum foyer through an imposing entrance. The foyer itself is a hall built on classical lines with a staircase in the middle, leading visitors to the exhibition above or downstairs to the cloakrooms and toilets. The information and ticket desk is located to the left of the entrance, and to the right is the museum shop. Photo: DREAM 2012.

their own orient themselves to "their" social group, be it a family, a school class or a couple of friends. Entering the museum together seems important. Locating the front entrance, however, is not always a simple process in museums with several buildings and entrances:

> Two groups are waiting at each entrance. A girl and a boy are seated in the hall talking about where their friends are. They are waiting. The girl's phone rings and she talks to somebody from the group outside (at the shop entrance). "We are inside the entrance." "You have to go around – otherwise you can't come in." "Around it, yes!" "Stay where you are, we'll come and get you." (Observation, Media Museum)

Three museums in our study guide visitors very explicitly through signage to the main entrance (the National Gallery, Arken, Moesgaard Museum). Conversely, museums surrounded by similar buildings but with other functions (Media Museum) have fewer options to direct visitors to the front entrance. In these locations, the arrival phase is typically fairly brief.

Orientation

The orientation phase focuses on locating oneself in relation to relevant courses of action: "Where am I and what can I do here?" This phase may begin well before entering the museum. At Moesgaard Museum, situated in a rural area with several buildings, visitors, rather than looking for the main entrance, locate themselves relative to the grounds and their different offerings. This process

Fig. 3. Moesgaard Museum is a cultural history museum located near Århus. The former exhibition building is part of an old manor and the foyer is found in one of the front buildings. It is small, almost anonymous, and very intimate. The foyer communicates a practical purpose, set up to provide information and sell tickets. The entrance to the exhibition is at the end of the foyer. Photo: DREAM 2012.

is supported by several maps, consulted by visitors on arrival to the parking lot. Museums with more formal entrances such as Arken or presenting big outdoor banners as seen at the National Gallery also assist visitors in orienting themselves before physically entering the museum. In other cases, the orientation phase begins at the museum entrance (the Media Museum, Experimentarium).

Foyer spaces function differently in communicating visitors' possible courses of action. For example, when visitors enter Experimentarium, they are led directly to the ticket booth. Attempting to stop, pause or back out is very difficult and the overall majority immediately approach the booth and pay. Conversely, when visitors enter the National Gallery foyer's large, open space, they are faced with a number of options and orientation tasks: The front desk is to their left, the museum shop to their right and the free exhibition area is located straight ahead. In the middle of the room is a stand with information brochures, as well as an elevator and a staircase leading up and down to galleries.

The orientation phase is not only about the range of options for action, but also about the sequence of actions. Some foyers clearly lay out a "main route" for the visitors to follow with ordered actions along the way. Part of the orientation phase is to locate where to begin with what, and in some foyers this equals locating the beginning of a main route. For example, at Arken, the main route literally presents itself as a line marked on the floor leading guests from the front door past several information kiosks on current exhibitions, on to the front desk and down to the cloakroom in the basement. If visitors do not follow the outlined route, a museum guard is there to remind them. Other foyers offer several entry points and possible routes to follow (the Media Museum) or no clear route (the National Gallery), inviting serendipity and a more browsing-like approach:

> A woman entering approaches a museum guard directly and asks: "Is there a place where you can drink coffee?" (Observation, National Gallery)

> A woman asks me if I know where the Voss exhibition is. She has just walked into the foyer in a determined manner, but stops when seeing me. I cannot help her and she goes straight to the front desk, where she interrupts the assistant, who is currently serving another visitor. (Observation, National Gallery)

Visitors familiar with the museum or entertaining particular goals or needs adopt a more strategic or prioritised approach, using signage, information kiosks, screens, posters, brochures and staff to quickly orient themselves.

Fig. 4. The Media Museum in Odense is part of an art gallery and situated in a former textile factory. There are two entrances to the foyer; the counter is in the middle of the room and acts as a ticket counter on one side and a café on the other. The foyer communicates a cosy and friendly atmosphere. At the far end, a staircase leads visitors to the exhibitions. Photo: DREAM 2012.

Service

Service normally takes place at the museum's front desk. Often, the front desk also provides informational material such as maps, posters and free brochures, and some visitors engage with these offers without dealing with the service staff. For example, at the National Gallery, many visitors try to get as close as possible to the counter to get information on prices while carefully maintaining a safe distance from the front desk staff until they are ready, thereby prolonging their orientation phase.

The service phase normally involves interaction between museum staff and visitors. At the very least, information and informational materials are exchanged, typically a map of the museum and interpretive material such as a printed guide or a folder related to a temporary exhibition. As one staff member puts it: "People like to get something. That way they feel informed, and they have something to bring home." (Interview, Moesgaard Museum)

While the museum typically provides a broad range of information material at several points in the foyer – at kiosks, brochure stands, on walls, tables and screens – the service phase facilitates a more targeted or personalised

Fig. 5. The Experimentarium is a science centre near Copenhagen. On arrival, visitors are led into the foyer past a small ticket booth. As the foyer opens up to the exhibition galleries, the noise level is high and immediately communicates a high level of activity. From the foyer, visitors can walk into the shop on the left or into the cloakroom and toilets on the right, or they may venture straight up a large staircase in the middle into the exhibitions. At certain times each day, staff performs different experiments in the middle of the foyer. Photo: DREAM 2012.

service. We clearly noted how the front desk assistant and the visitor cooperate in matching the museum offers with the visitor's needs. For example, at the National Gallery we observed a young woman asking the front desk assistant whether this is the place to retrieve an iPod (containing the museum app), and we observed a female tourist approaching with her husband and three children asking whether the museum provides audio guides. Others arrive at the desk displaying no knowledge about available or desirable services. We noted how staff are at pains to "read" visitors and customise the selection of services according to different needs. For instance, tourists from outside Denmark will not receive a museum club membership offer (National Gallery), elderly people may not be offered an iPod loan (National Gallery) and visitors who are museum club members are not handed a map of the museum unless they ask for it.

A great constraint on the service phase is time. This means that especially front personnel operate within a continuum from basic to extensive service, the latter being initiated by questions such as "Are you here for the first time?" (Moesgaard Museum). If the answer is affirmative, the front desk assistant may launch

into a long explanation of where to go and what to explore or offer a detailed demonstration of how to use an audio guide:

> The front desk assistant says that there is often no time to advertise the app, she must weigh delivery of iPods in relation to how many people are queuing at the counter. There are also some visitors she chooses not to inform, as she thinks they have enough to just keep track of their ticket, a brochure and map, especially older people. (Interview, National Gallery)

The physical layout of the foyer and particularly the front desk often facilitate resources for queuing. Some foyers are organised so as to "funnel" visitors into a queue (Experimentarium). More open foyer spaces invite more self-organised queuing practices (National Gallery, Media Museum, Arken). However, museums put considerable efforts into organising the foyer and the service phase to reduce or ease visitors' waiting time. For instance, at Arken the museum shop is located just next to the front desk, allowing visitors to look at books and collectibles while waiting for service. Furthermore, the museum has a fast track for museum club members who can check in with a self-service device. At Experimentarium, exhibition "pilots" perform shows in the foyer during the busiest hours to entertain visitors waiting in line. The National Gallery has experimented with museum staff being available for service in the middle of the hall, away from the service desk, in a fashion similar to floor time at exhibition spaces (Simon 2010). Finally, queues prompt some visitors to seek service elsewhere. For example, we noted guards being approached for service provision such as information on opening hours or the use of audio guides (National Gallery).

Preparation

The preparation phase is the final phase before visitors enter the galleries. This typically involves a visit to the cloakrooms and restroom facilities. In some museums, these facilities are clearly demarcated as the last stops on the "main route" before entering the exhibition area (Arken). At Arken, the cloakroom and restrooms are found downstairs from the foyer at a level leading straight into the galleries. At other museums, these amenities are presented as visible, but more optional stops (Experimentarium). In some museums, service facilities are located in the basement, with low ceilings and no daylight (Arken, National Gallery); this marks them as belonging to the foyer and not to the exhibition areas.

During the preparation phase, we observed visitors waiting for each other and reconnecting with their group. This is particularly obvious when they have split up for some reason during the entry phases. In general, visitors in groups negotiate their readiness to enter the exhibition area: They consult maps and information material and talk about what to approach first. School classes are given last-minute practical instructions on where to go, what to focus on and how to reconnect:

> Teacher informs students about the day's events and meeting times for lunch. (Observation, Experimentarium)

The preparation phase may also include different types of visitors' behavioural adjustments. For example, at the National Gallery we observed a school teacher admonishing her pupils that the museum is a place where they should be quiet and listen to their guide and telling them that they should not run or roughhouse with each other. Similarly, at the same museum, a mother told her daughter to get rid of her

chewing gum before entering the exhibition area:

> Teacher (with 4th–5th grade students): "Listen up. Mobile phones. Turn them off and put them in your pocket. Hang up your coats. Place your bags properly." (Observation, Moesgaard Museum)

Getting the right equipment ready may also be part of the preparation phase. For instance, outside exhibition spaces at the National Gallery, headphones are accessible for visitors who wish to use the museum's smartphone application on their own phone.

As the last stage before visitors enter the exhibition area, the preparation phase typically involves some kind of control or checking, often by a museum guard: Is the visitor ready to enter the exhibition area, including being in possession of a ticket? Are bags properly left in the locker room? Is the "equipment" at hand? A tangible tool of preparation is the bag measurer, found both at Arken and the Media Museum, which lets visitors check whether their bags are allowed into the exhibition area. As noted, visitors may choose to evade or fail to follow particular entry phases. For example, at the National Gallery we observed a visitor returning to the service desk because he realised his bag was too big for the locker room. At Experimentarium, a visitor went back to get change for the locker room. Naturally, visitors will also be set back to an earlier phase if they fail to complete the entry phases.

Practising the museum foyer on exit preparation

The preparation phase is visitors' first phase before departure. It typically begins in the exhibition area with group visitors negotiating and agreeing on leaving the museum. They start to orient themselves towards the exit. With the exception of Moesgaard Museum, visitors must leave through the foyer at all museums studied. Thus, finding the exit equals finding the way back.

The preparation phase involves practical measures such as gathering personal items. Visitors begin this process already in the exhibition area and finalise it in the cloakroom. Contingent on the physical organisation of the museum, the cloakroom visit may take place early during the exiting process. For example, at Arken, the National Gallery and Moesgaard Museum, visitors typically pick up their personal belongings before continuing their exit process, a situation that may constrain their ensuing actions in the foyer and in the museum shop:

> Two elderly women are standing by the stairs talking. The first says, "Are you going down to get your bag?" The other says, "Yes, and I also have to use the restroom." The first woman goes to the shop while the other goes downstairs. (Observation, Arken)

In the cloakrooms, we observed many visitors practising a sort of time-out, checking their phones and chatting. One family pulled out fruit and cake from the locker room and started to eat it (Experimentarium). Some visitors studied brochures on display (Arken), while others seemed to rest. For example, at the National Gallery, we observed a small group of young people hanging out on a bench for half an hour in the somewhat dark and uninviting downstairs cloakroom. At Experimentarium, where exhibitions in the form of distorted mirrors and magnifying glasses are placed in the cloakroom, visitors took their time playing with these exhibits, which they did not do on arrival.

We noted how visitors wait for each other and school classes assemble before leaving. This typically happens in the foyer, which serves as a reunion point and waiting zone, both practices that the museum foyers studied facilitate through various means. At Moesgaard Museum, visitors typically leave the small foyer quickly and wait outside. At the large National Gallery foyer, despite its couches and artworks on display, the wide, open space does not seem to invite visitors to linger. Rather, visitors were seen waiting in the dark downstairs cloakroom, as noted, or sitting on the staircase outside. Conversely, the wide staircase inside the Experimentarium foyer provides an excellent waiting area. At the Media Museum and at Arken, the museum shop is part of the foyer and visitors typically browse the shop while waiting.

Visitors who are not waiting for others were seen taking a seat on the couches (National Gallery) or in the seating area (Media Museum), or they were observed hanging out on or around the staircase (Experimentarium). Some gather information from the brochure stands (Arken), a few study displayed artworks (Arken, National Gallery), while others make use of the museum computers (Arken) or write postcards (National Gallery). In that way, the facilities and resources available in the foyer communicate resting or pausing in different ways. Events are spectacular resources in the Experimentarium foyer. During a late-afternoon event, a large hot-air balloon was inflated, and people who were about to leave before the event chose to stay on. From the museum's point of view the event serves as a last branding of its engagement rationale, and from the visitors' point of view it operates as a grand finale:

> 3.30 p.m. Event starts: "Welcome to Experimentarium's vestibule, also called the Orange Stage." During the event, no one is leaving. The event lasts 15 minutes, and a 5 metre high balloon inflates and floats up into the entrance hall. During the event, visitors are sitting on the stairs and on the floor along the sides of the sealed-off area. Adults are standing up at the back. There are also people around the balcony. After the event, children who want to try steering the balloon queue up. Many go to the shop. Others are getting ready to go out. (Observation, Experimentarium)

Service

While the service phase in most of the museums studied is mandatory when entering the museum because of ticket purchase, it plays a minimal role during the departure process. For example, few visitors request service at the front desk on their way out, except when returning borrowed audio guides (National Gallery, Arken). Still, we did observe visitors approaching the front desk to obtain brochures (Arken), access information about bus schedules or ask about going to a certain place in the city (Moesgaard Museum). At the National Gallery, one visitor went to the front desk to ask what an "allegory" was. Some visitors also come to the front desk to exchange their ticket for a membership card (National Gallery, Arken) or a season pass (Experimentarium).

Whether visitors use the front desk resources also depends on its location in relation to the museum's standard route of exit. At Moesgaard Museum, visitors to the permanent exhibition pass close by the front desk on their way out. This is probably why we observed more interaction than at the other museums studied between front desk assistants and visitors on their way out – including an exchange of polite goodbyes and thanks.

As noted, the service phase also involves returning equipment provided by the museum. Except in relation to audio guides, which must

be returned at the front desk (Arken, the National Gallery), visitors self-organise these processes, parking borrowed strollers in the designated area and hanging up headphones borrowed on entering the exhibition (National Gallery). Brochures and museum maps sometimes end up in garbage cans. At Arken, visitors must return their tickets for recycling purposes in a transparent box just inside the front door. Many visitors wondered about the purpose of this, and some visitors became uncomfortable when they realised they had lost their tickets:

A group of nine elderly women go towards the exit. At the box, one of them says "Oh, should we…" She and a few of the others throw their tickets in. One of them hesitates and says "Why?" She does not throw hers in. (Observation, Arken)

The ticket return, even if it is not transparent to all, serves as a symbolic gesture in transforming visitors back into non-visitors.

One possible service stop on the way out is the museum shop. As noted, at the Media Museum and at Arken, the shop is part of the foyer and is centrally located in relation to the standard route of exit. At Experimentarium and the National Gallery, the shop is located next to, but separate from, the foyer; while at Moesgaard Museum the shop is located in a different building straight across from the foyer exit. Thus, visitors are not prompted to stop at these shops, but many still make the museum shop part of their departure process:

A visitor goes to the desk saying he would like to buy a book about Jacob Holdt after seeing the exhibition on him. He is standing at the ticket counter and is asked to go to shop desk. (Observation, Media Museum)

Evaluation

Evaluation can occur at any time during the departure process and anywhere in and around the foyer when visitors talk about their visit. Yet, most of the conversations we overheard were not evaluative in character. Rather, most conversations were about practical matters such as where to go next and where to meet up – if people talked at all. When visitors did comment on their visit, it was typically through short exchanges:

Foreign lady on the way out to the front desk assistant: "Thank you. It was really beautiful. I enjoyed it." (Observation, Moesgaard Museum)

An older woman and three children are standing by the lockers eating biscuits. The bubble show is announced on loudspeakers. Several children say, "We already saw that." An older man arrives. One child: "This is more fun than the Tivoli Gardens – almost." Older woman: "At least you got to run around." They all walk towards the exit. (Observation, Experimentarium)

The evaluation phase is facilitated by the museum in different ways. At Moesgaard Museum, a traditional guestbook is found at the front desk in the foyer. At Experimentarium, a "tell us about your visit" box in the form of a touchscreen computer is available for visitors just next to the exit door. At Arken, visitors can cast their vote for Arken as the best experience in town. Generally, we observed few visitors making use of these resources. In some museums, evaluation is already encouraged at the final stage of the exhibition just before entering the foyer. For instance, as part of the special exhibition "Life and Death" at the National Gallery, curators established a "reflection zone". Other museums offer visitors brochures or other takeaways for further after-visit reflection. For example, as

part of a special exhibition at Experimentarium, visitors can create a personal website with results from experiments conducted on site to be accessed at home for further study.

Museum resources, especially books, may also prompt visitor evaluation in more unstructured ways. For example, at Moesgaard Museum we observed a family reflecting on the bog body, the Grauballe Man, which they had just seen in the gallery, while looking at book illustrations in the shop. At Experimentarium, we observed children playing in the foyer with magnifying glasses and soap bubbles bought at the museum shop.

Departure

The departure phase is connected to the boundaries of the physical museum, but it is not necessarily connected to the exit doors of the foyer. In two of the museums studied, the departure is directly related to the exit doors. When visitors leave through the doors of Experimentarium or the Media Museum, their visit is definitively over. Conversely, when visitors exit the foyer door of Moesgaard Museum, they are faced by several historical buildings, an ice-cream stand and a large playground – all of which invite people to stay longer. Similarly, Arken is surrounded by a large beach park, and especially in the summertime visitors round off their visit with a walk on the beach. In much the same way, the wide steps leading away from the National Gallery facilitate visitors lingering, smoking a cigarette or organising personal items before moving on. Thus, these four museums communicate that visitors can have a "soft" transformation into non-visitors when exiting the foyer.

Discussion

In this study, we have documented four phases of entry transformation – arrival, orientation, service and preparation – and four exit phases – preparation, service, evaluation and departure. While the different phases can be found in all of our museums, our empirical analysis illuminates the different ways in which people articulate these phases. Physical layout, signage, staff location and modes of communication vary considerably across the museums studied, and this variety is crucial to the ways in which visitors take up their foyer routes.

Notably, our analytical examples illuminate how the foyer space of communication operates across a continuum from separation from the exhibition galleries to more porous boundaries between the two. Sometimes exhibits and events are taking place in the foyer space, while processes of service, such as provision of audio guides, may take place in the exhibition space. Sometimes processes of entering and exiting are put on hold, or processes can go backwards. In that way, visitors may not take up all phases or they may combine them in a different order from that presented in our empirical section. Generally, we find that the phases of entry transformation are more scripted than the phases of exit transformation which are practised more loosely.

Irrespective of varieties, some important empirical similarities stand out. Most people act with an attention to being part of a social group, even if they arrive on their own or only form a group once they are inside the foyer. In addition, their routes are highly dependent on their familiarity with the museum and their modes of interaction with the staff and other visitors. This sociability points to the importance of the mundane ways in which museum-going is re-enacted with every visit and to the crucial communicative role played by the foyer in setting the tone for this process. This analytical insight cannot be reduced to the

significance of consistent museum branding and visibility in guiding museum visitors, nor to facilitating their correct attitudes and needs. It has more to do with an acknowledgement that museum-going is a constant re-articulation of socio-cultural scripts enacted though modes of communication. What at first sight may seem to be very obvious and mundane tasks performed in the foyer space assumes social significance when studied as sense-making practices of transformation.

It is illuminating to compare our findings with our initial literature review, since existing literature points to some general transformative functions that our study serves to document and refine. Most prevalent are references to a transformative function of *separation* (Gennep 1908/1961, Duncan & Wallach 1980, Duncan 1991, 1995, Ambrose & Paine 2012, Kristiansen 2015). This prevalence may be a result of the iconic nature of many museums – they stand out from the ordinary as we noted. When museums are compared to or modelled on temples, separation is alluded to as a marking off of the sacred from the profane. The literature also notes how the foyer may function as *connection* between the everyday lives of visitors and the museum visit itself (Frary 1916, Black 2005, Psarra 2005). The foyer may also function as a means of support to visitors, symbolically (Bitgood 2002) and physically (Ambrose & Paine 2006). Finally, the museum foyer is seen to offer a transformative function of *resolution* in that it provides an opportunity for visitors to focus on what they have experienced and what they take away in relation to substance, sociability, knowledge and reflection (Doering 1999, Psarra 2005). The transformative functions illuminated by the research literature can be mapped onto our empirical findings as seen in fig. 6:

Fig. 6 serves to illuminate and document how our empirical study may help fine-tune and nuance conceptual definitions of foyer spaces and their transformative functions. More specifically, it illustrates how these

Fig. 6. Foyers' theoretical transformative functions as compared with empirical foyer practices of entering and exiting the museum.

Transformative functions	*Entry phases*	*Exit phases*
Separation	**Arrival** (entering the foyer)	**Departure** (leaving the exhibition space)
Connection	**Orientation** (deciding what to see and where to find it)	**Preparation** (visiting cloakroom, waiting for family, etc.)
Support	**Service** (ticketing, exhibition technologies, etc.)	**Service** (e.g. interacting with front personnel)
Resolution	**Preparation** (visiting cloakroom, etc.)	**Evaluation** (e.g. discussing exhibitions)

transformations are about processes of communication and action.

The two main shortcomings of our study are the small number of museums and their specific geographical and cultural settings. Further research should provide a clearer idea of how different museums (location, size, substance) and different types of visitors (gender, age, class, etc.) practise phases of entry transformation and phases on exit transformation. Additionally, there is a need to explore analytically how and why visitors sometimes skip, recombine or evade the general and transformative processes of entering and exiting as documented in this study.

Conclusion

The findings in this study build upon and support previous research that stresses the importance of the foyer for visitors' overall museum journey. In particular, this study supplements a previous study focusing on museum foyers' functional affordances (Mortensen et al. 2014). While the previous study also defines the museum foyer as a communicative space, it focuses on categorising communicative functions. In contrast, the present study emphasises transformative processes of communication in the lobby, and it documents visitors' phases of entry transformation and phases on exit transformation.

Our study demonstrates the validity of what may be termed a *dual analytical perspective* of communication on museum foyers: It jointly pays attention to institutional and visitor dimensions, and it focuses on the routes of entry and exit rather than on functional entities. To the extent that museums are attentive to their foyer spaces, an institutional perspective will often foreground the importance of, for example, management, staff training, amenities and shopping (Black 2005). Conversely, a visitor perspective may focus on visitor satisfaction or needs across various facilities. A joint perspective invites a more holistic approach attentive to the match, as well as the mismatch, between what is institutionally ascribed and what visitors practise. As we have seen, mismatches in the form of visitor detours and "alternative" uses cannot be written off as misunderstandings or a lack of insight on the part of the museum or the visitors. Rather, these "clashes" may serve as eye-openers to the important role played by the foyer in terms of practising museum-going and to the insights to be gained from analysis of actual behaviours and modes of communication.

Our focus on routes performed rather than functional tasks conducted equally facilitates a holistic perspective on museum foyers. They are exit spaces as much as entry spaces, as they are more commonly understood. As our study documents, exiting is not the reverse image of entering the museum; rather, it also includes phases such as visitors' evaluation of their visit and preparation for re-assuming the role of a non-visitor. An analytical perspective on processes and routes of practice illuminates a more granular understanding of the foyer as an ambient leisure space of resting, waiting, playing, having informal discussions and meeting friends and family.

The holistic approach presented here may be of some use for architects, designers and museum professionals in their ongoing attempts to facilitate the overall visitor experience in the museum and heritage sectors. It invites a conceptualisation of museum foyers as sites of social and communicative practices rather than as physical ramifications or functional entities. As such, our approach points to mundane, even self-evident, features

which are key to visitors, even if they are often deemed beyond the core activities performed in exhibition galleries.

On a grander canvas, analytical attention to museum foyers may catalyse wider reflections on museum development. As we have documented, foyers are contact zones to the outside world as much as transit points to museum interiors. This permeability makes foyers obvious foci for ongoing professional deliberations on how museums interact with society at large, on what terms and for what purposes. How, for example, are aspects of entertainment and consumption set off against aspects of information and social engagement? While our analysis has not included shops, cafés and other expanding spaces of consumption, these ancillary foyer spaces will undoubtedly "colour" how museum foyers are practised – and studied – in future. An important perspective on our results is therefore how museums will balance auratic versus accessible aspects of communication, exceptional versus welcoming voices. How such balancing acts play out will very much depend on whether museums follow public-service or commercial definitions of visitors as citizens or consumers, pro-sumers or citizen-consumers. While our study has offered a theoretical frame and provided a preliminary empirical understanding of the foyer as a transformative space of communication, it is our hope that future studies may develop more detailed and contextualised pictures of museum foyers as zones of societal interaction and reflection.

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Notes

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